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Office of the Coordinator of Information
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Dear Mr. Goldman:

Thank you for your interest in the Afghan Media Project and for the submission of your concept paper.

Your project design will be reviewed by a USIA panel, which will select those concept papers that appear to have the greatest potential for achieving the objectives outlined in the Federal Register announcement August 26th. We will complete this review by October 31th, and will notify you as soon as possible thereafter of the disposition of your submission.

If you have any questions about this process, please contact me at the following phone number. (202) 485-6973.

Sincerely,

Saul S. Geffer
Director
Afghan Media Staff

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Report by John O. Koehler
on his trip to Pakistan and Europe
to Assess the Current Situation
of Media Coverage about
Afghanistan

October 6, 1985

News Coverage of the Afghanistan War

Part I

Introduction

News coverage of the conflict between the Afghan resistance movements and the armed forces of the Soviet Union and the Karmal regime is the most difficult in the history of modern warfare.

Clashes between the combatants are limited chiefly to guerrilla type actions. Much of the Mujahideen activity is restricted to night operations because of the total communist air control. Although the Mujahideen are able to use motor vehicles and operate a few captured armored vehicles in some areas, the resistance fighters move mainly on foot or horse/mule back. The latter is especially true when crossing the frontier between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Supplies are transported over incredibly difficult terrain on horses, mules or camels.

This, then, is the situation confronting the news reporters and television crews.

It is the rare news correspondent or TV film crew that is willing to undergo the ordeal of foot marches of six or 13 days or even up to five weeks to reach a Mujahideen unit. They face not only the physical strain and the danger of interception by communist forces, but also the fact that after all this effort there may not be the reward of witnessing military action.

However, Mujahideen officials in Peshawar, the staging area for journalists venturing into Afghanistan, always endeavor to assign them to their ablest and best-known field commanders to have reasonable assurance of seeing military action.

Newsmen may be forced to remain in the field for a number of weeks -- some have stayed several months -- before returning to Pakistan over the same arduous and circuitous routes.

And so, it takes just as much time for field reports with combat information collected by the Mujahideen to reach Peshawar for eventual dissemination to news media. Thus, for example, an ambush of a Soviet military convoy on July 11, 1985, in the area of Balkh in northern Afghanistan, some 350 air miles from Peshawar, was not reported to the media until September 1.

Just as exaggeration of victories and minimalization of defeats and losses has occurred in all wars, this has been a particularly acute problem with the Mujahideen.

It cannot be ruled out that some commanders and political functionaries have resorted to distortions to further their own causes --

However, it is my conclusion that by-and-large mis-reporting has occurred, and to some extent still is occurring, because of ignorance and a total lack of experience in modern warfare.

The Mujahideen is a rag-tag force predominantly composed of peasants, small shopkeepers and businessmen and young men without a day of schooling. Illiteracy is high.

Except for defectors from the Karmal forces, none have had any formal training. Only now, after six years of war, they are beginning to distinguish the difference between a tank and an armored personnel carrier. They have no vehicle or aircraft identification charts. Every plane spotted is a MIG and every helicopter is a MI-24.

As a result, the information on combat activities originating from Mujahideen sources is rarely accepted as credible by western journalists, whose professional obligation is to double-check all information before it is included in their reports. I shall return to the credibility problem in another segment of this report.

I feel that news coverage of the Afghanistan war can be improved, although numerous obstacles need to be removed.

In this report, I will describe in detail the situation as I found it during my investigation which began with briefings in Washington, August 26, and took me to New York, Paris, Islamabad, Peshawar, Frankfurt, and London.

Foreign Correspondents:

Ten news organizations from non-communist countries maintain full-time correspondents in Pakistan. All are based in Islamabad. With the exception of a New York Times stringer (Arthur Bonner), no Western news correspondents are permitted by the Pakistan government to reside or maintain an office in Peshawar, where the bulk of the Afghan war news sources are located. The Pakistan government has not explained this policy.

All Pakistan-based correspondents' primary mission, with the exception of the Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty representatives, is to cover events in Pakistan, although their beat does include Afghanistan.

Thus they may devote only 50 per cent or even less of their time and resources to Afghan coverage. They make periodic trips to Peshawar to gather news or maintain contact with sources. Most of their time, however, is spent in Islamabad.

The organizations with full-time correspondents are:

Associated Press
Reuters
Agence France Press

Voice of America
Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty
Radio France International
Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung
Nordpress (West German feature agency)
Far Eastern Economic Review

There are also a number of Pakistani stringers working for such organizations as National Broadcasting Co. and the independent British television film agency VISNEWS.

In addition, New Delhi-based staff correspondents from United Press International, The Washington Post and The New York Times visit Pakistan from time to time to gather material for Afghan war situationers and features.

None of the regular correspondents will accept Afghan war reports, regardless of source, at face value. Each has his own way of double checking, using various organizations to be described later in this report.

Correspondents have described weekly briefings by the U.S. and British embassies as well as The Institute of Strategic Studies (Pakistani), headed by former Brigadier General Noor Husain, as the most reliable sources.

Mohammed Aftab, local staff correspondent of Associated Press for more than 25 years, said reaction from correspondents to the U.S. briefings given in Islamabad was "positive" and their reports reflect this. New Delhi-based newsmen, on the other hand, have a "negative" attitude toward the U.S. briefings held there.

"Their cynicism is not justified. Even what is done now is admirable and the newsmen's skepticism is not totally justified. They are killing something that is already fragile", Aftab observed.

Aftab suggested that the briefings could perhaps be more effective if once a month a Kabul-based officer could be present to give fill-ins on such matters as the economy or the mood in the capital. "We wish we could talk from time to time to a man and not be the captive to a piece of paper. Produce a video tape once in a while...it would make it look more real and can dampen the cynicism."

Even though the correspondents view the briefings as the sources of the most reliable information, Aftab's comments as well as the description by his colleagues of the briefings as the "Tuesday Follies" clearly show a high degree of distrust.

I do not see any ideological motives behind this attitude. The fact is that erroneous information has been disseminated, some for political reasons, and newsmen have been burned by it.

Representatives of VOA and RFE/RL must be particularly cautious. Blatantly false information broadcast over these entities could hand the Soviets a potent propaganda club. This would explain why Don Larrimore of VOA is especially vocal about misinformation.

Visiting Journalists (Print Media):

Staff journalists on temporary assignments to Pakistan for their respective organizations are mainly based in New Delhi. Their tasks normally are two-fold: cover the Pakistani political and economic scene and other events in Pakistan, and write Afghan war situationers. They occasionally venture into Afghanistan for spot reporting.

Most journalists joining up with the Mujahideen to report from inside Afghanistan are young free-lancers. Their motivations range from seeking adventure and a quick way to "make a name," to idealism. Some have contracts with established organizations and a handful are established scholars who combine their intellectual pursuits with journalistic efforts.

For a great many free-lancers, going into Afghanistan is a one-time venture; perhaps fewer than a half dozen regularly contribute to newspapers and such periodicals as The Economist or the Far Eastern Economic Review.

Whatever their motives, I feel that free-lance journalists are and will be highly important to coverage of the Afghan war and must be supported.

Nearly all free-lancers converge on Peshawar. Those seeking to link up with the Mujahideen for the first time arrive without a clue on how this is done. They usually check into one of the less expensive hotels (nearly all are operating on the proverbial shoestring) where they may find colleagues who point them in the right direction. They may contact diplomatic representatives of their respective countries for guidance. There is no media information center specifically to advise them.

However, the American Center with its present director, John Dixon, functions as an unofficial media support activity. Dixon has put together a list of contacts useful for those wishing to cover Afghan affairs. It is an invaluable tool for free-lancers as well as staff correspondents. Although his principal assignment is managing the American Center, Dixon spends a great deal of time and energy on helping the visiting journalists. He is always ready to offer assistance and his home is obviously a popular gathering place for journalists.

Dixon is perfectly suited for his role as the unofficial media adviser. He is a low-key professional who is extremely well wired into the Mujahideen scene. He obviously likes people and he is dedicated to his job, working seven days a week, 12 or more hours a day, to handle both his official and unofficial tasks.

I shall return to the media center question later.

Afghan Refugee Parties:

Fundamentalist

Hizb-e-Islami (led by Gul Badeen Hekmatyar)
Hizb-e-Islami (led by Mohammad Younis Khalis)
Jamiat-e-Islami (led by Professor Burhanuddin Rabbani)
Itihad-e-Islami Bara-e-Azadi (led by Professor Abdul Rasul Sayyaf)

Moderate

Harakat-e-Innquilab-e-Islami (led by Maulvi Mohammad Nabi Mohammad)
Jabha-e-Nijat-Milli (led by Sibghatullah Mojadidi)
Mahaz-e-Milli Islami (led by Syed Ahmed Gailani)

I was able to make contact with officials of the fundamentalist parties except Itihad-e-Islami led by Sayyaf. Requests for an appointment were ignored.

No contact could be established with anyone from the moderate party Jabha-e-Nijat-Milli.

Since I had no contact with two parties, I cannot say whether these have taken journalists into Afghanistan.

All others, however, have been accommodating journalists, the most active being the moderates led by Gailani followed by Prof. Rabbani's Jamiat.

The groups have press spokesmen who function with varying degrees of efficiency. They issue news bulletins but not on a regular basis. Some spokesmen act as stringers for western correspondents. But, as explained earlier, their information is used with great care.

In my conversations with the various party people, I explained my mission and invited suggestions on how to improve the flow of news from combat units in Afghanistan.

All recognized the problem of credibility and said they had been working hard on improvements. I believe this is true. They clearly understand the value of factual news reporting to further their cause. This is, of course, why they are so eager to arrange for trips inside Afghanistan by Western correspondents.

I explained the need for Mujahideen "combat reporters" as well as photographers and TV cameramen. I suggested a training program and asked whether the parties would assign men for such training. I noted the political rivalry that has existed between the parties, but in view of the "new alliance" I wondered whether the parties would send their men to classes in which all parties were represented. All said they would.

Afghan News Organizations:

At a meeting with Pakistan Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials in Islamabad, I was handed a list of news organizations by Arif Ayub, the ministry's director for Afghanistan, who suggested that I evaluate them. These were:

Agence Afghan Press
Afghan Islamic Press
Afghan Information and Documentation
Afghan Information Center
Mujahid Press Agency
Union of Afghan Writers
Shoora Saqafat-e-Jihad
Mujahid Woles

Agence Afghan Press (AAP)

AAP is registered in London, where the agency maintains an office headed by Sayed Mohammad Tanzeem Wasti, AAP managing director. Wasti also functions as the editor and fund raiser. Wasti says he has a staff of three persons -- secretary, clerk, and telex operator.

Wasti claimed that AAP is being financed by Afghans and Pakistanis living in London. It was founded in 1980.

The London bureau serves chiefly as a relay center of material revived from AAP's Pakistan headquarters in Rawalpindi.

The Rawalpindi bureau is headed by Mukhtar Hassan, who has worked as a journalist since 1964 for small weekly newspapers with time out for teaching in Baluchistan. He says he has been covering Afghanistan since 1972 and was imprisoned for three months in Kabul as a result of his coverage of the Herat demonstrations.

Hassan claims a staff of 15, including eight staff journalists. AAP has additional bureaus in Peshawar, Quetta, and Lahore.

Spot news is sent via Rawalpindi PTT telex (AAP does not have its own machine in Rawalpindi) to London. There, Wasti claims, it is relayed to 15 newspapers and agencies. In addition he says AAP mails weekly and daily news items and features to 64 Western newspapers and agencies and to 48 Arabic newspapers and agencies.

AAP produces features in English, Arabic, and Pashto.

By Afghan/Pakistani standards, AAP's production appears impressive.

Note, however, that the bulk of the material was published by Pakistani newspapers.

The only person I found in numerous interviews who extolled the journalistic virtues of AAP was Noor Husain, director general of the Institute of Strategic Studies in Islamabad.

All other sources described AAP as absolutely untrustworthy. No Western news agency will touch its copy.

The most telling description of AAP came from Mohammed Aftab. Associated Press staff correspondent in Islamabad, who said:

"In my professional view, they never double-check anything. They cook up stories. They lack the basic (journalistic) discipline and professionalism. Their English is unusable. They really went down hill in the last year."

Aftab's statement on the decline of AAP would explain why AAP has not had an annual report since 1983. When asked why there had been no reports since, Wasti (London AAP) said he has not had the time. He could not find any reports prior to 1983.

Probing further to resolve the discrepancy between Husain's statement and those of all other interviewees, I was told by a number of sources that Husain's operation is financed by Jamiat-e-Islami of Pakistan which is tied to Hizb-e-Islami (Hekmatyar) of Afghanistan, both fundamentalist groups.

AAP, I am told, is financed by the two groups.

Rosanne Klass of Freedom House, New York, said: "AAP is the propaganda arm of Hekmatyar."

It is my conclusion that AAP is not an independent operation. For this reason and for their reputation of inaccurate reporting I recommend against using AAP for dissemination of news to the printed media.

However, Mukhtar Hassan has told me about their video efforts and I viewed considerable material. While it is below professional standards, I believe AAP could be useful in future TV film operations and I will return to this aspect in my TV recommendations.

Afghan Islamic Press:

This is a one-man show, run by Yaqub Sharafat, cousin of the leader of the Hezb-e-Islami, Maulvi Younis Khalis. His office is in the Khalis headquarters in Peshawar. I had an appointment with him but he broke it to go to the fighting in Paktia with Khalis.

According to information gathered by John Dixon, USIA Peshawar, Sharafat has acted as stringer and tipster for numerous Western news organizations. He edits a journal for the Khalis organization.

Sharafat is a stringer for VOA's Don Larrimore, who likes him.

The Khalis group does not seem to have any video equipment.

Afghan Information and Documentation Center:

The Center was started in the early '80s by Fazle Akhbar, who trained as a radio journalist in Kabul and spent four years in Moscow working for the Pashto service of Radio Moscow. Returning to Kabul in the late '70s, he served as director of Radio Kabul. He quit when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan.

Akhbar has a six-man staff in Peshawar, where he works out of his modest home. He also has a reporter at Miran Shah, an important Mujahideen staging area.

Akhbar collects information from all seven parties and he says he is recognized as a "neutral." Although he is being accused by some of being a Communist, I believe he has the grudging respect of the Mujahideen because he is working for the cause.

Besides collecting news from the parties, his people also question border crossers and from time to time Akhbar himself makes trips into Afghanistan.

Akhbar concentrates on spot news, which he disseminates through occasional telex messages to Western correspondents. The bulk of his information is packaged in a monthly news bulletin, which also contains features and situationers .

Akhbar was extensively interviewed and it became clear that he is keenly aware of the credibility problem that surrounds news from the Afghan combat area. He said he is constantly double-checking reports and when in doubt he will not use them. He appeared to be very cautious.

Much of his information appears to originate directly with field commanders.

I feel that Akhbar is trying to do the best possible journalistic job under difficult conditions.

Akhbar said he finances his operation entirely from the income received from the sale of his monthly bulletin, which he sells for 1000 Rs in Pakistan and \$100 annually elsewhere. I doubt that he has more than 100 subscribers. He also receives fees for his VOA broadcast work (in Pashto).

Akhbar speaks good English. However, he does not have a well-developed news sense. He volunteered that he is aware of this short-coming and said he would welcome assistance from a foreign professional.

Afghan Information Center:

The Afghan Information Center was created in 1980 by Dr. Sayd B. Majrooh, former professor of philosophy at Kabul University.

Majrooh's operation functions similarly to Akhbar's Information and Documentation Center, collecting information from all parties and relying on travelers. He has a staff of five in Peshawar, and one each in Quetta and Miran Shah.

Majrooh disseminates his information only through his monthly bulletin. His material is generally more analytical, dealing with the mood of the people, food supply, etc.

Many Mujahideen do not like Majrooh because they say he no longer is a Muslim as he has developed Western tastes. Nevertheless, he, too, is grudgingly admired because he did not "run away to the Paris Sorbonne or to America" but remained to help the Jihad.

Majrooh, too, lacks news sense but he takes great care to present only the information that he believes to be accurate, and he does not play favorites.

He is not afraid to publish "bad" news when he knows that the facts are on his side. In August, Majrooh revealed that Commander Ahmad Shah Massood of Panjsher had attempted to form a united front with his Mujahideen of Jamiat and Hizb-e-Islami (Hekmatyar) in order to encircle an air base. The Hizb-e-Islami agreed initially but then ambushed and killed Massood's emissaries.

While this caused a considerable stir, there was no public attack on Majrooh by the Hekmatyar group and not a single Mujahideen official mentioned the incident to me in interviews or attacked Majrooh because of it.

Majrooh sells his bulletin for 400 Rs in Pakistan and for \$50 a year elsewhere. He is believed to have roughly the same circulation as Akhbar -- about 100 subscribers.

Majrooh appears to be better informed on the internal workings of the parties and he gives excellent briefings. Most foreign journalists covering Afghanistan, either as regular staffers or as free-lancers, seek out Majrooh to be briefed.

Mujahid Press Agency:

This agency, insofar as John Dixon (USIS Peshawar) could determine, has disappeared. Its former leader, Saeed Rasul, when the agency was part of the Itihad-e-Islami Bara-e-Azadi (Sayyaf), is now with the Jamiat (Rabanni).

Union of Afghan Writers:

This group was founded in 1984 primarily to translate anti-communist books into Pashto and Dari .

Dr. Rasul Amin is the leading figure in the organization of nine Afghan intellectuals and experts in a wide range of disciplines. Until 1980, Amin was Dean of Kabul University's Social Science Faculty.

Recently, the writers group began work on an English-language journal, and at this writing may have already gone to print. Regrettably I was not able to see any proofs. However, Amin outlined one article to me which I think would find a ready reprint market in the West. It deals with Soviet military tactics and was written by a former Afghan army major who graduated from Frunze Academy, the Soviet Union's most distinguished military academy.

I found Amin to be a dedicated scholar whose group is well worth supporting.

Shoora Saqafat-e-Jihad:

We were unable to locate the leader of this group, Rashid Saljiki, while I was in Peshawar.

Mujahid Woless:

Mohammad Hassan Wolessmal, who has engaged in disseminating information on Afghanistan since 1984, was unavailable when I visited Peshawar.

Communications:

There are no rapid means of communications available to send information out of Afghanistan -- at least not for journalistic purposes. I heard rumors that at least one Mujahideen party is operating a clandestine radio link between an area in Afghanistan and Peshawar, but I could not confirm this.

Thus, all battle information reaching Peshawar comes by courier or is extracted from Mujahideen during de-briefing sessions upon their return from the field. At Harakat headquarters, for example, I observed a bundle of messages received that day. Some messages were written on cloth.

Depending on where the information originates, it can take anywhere from three days to as many as five weeks to reach Peshawar.

Shah Rukh Gran, vice commander of Nahas-e-Milli Islami (Gailani), said at least 30 radio links would be needed to cover Afghanistan combat areas adequately.

Gran said he was not concerned about possible Soviet intercepts and subsequent bombings. Radios inside Afghanistan would be frequently moved and those on the border would have antenna some distance from the sets.

The ideal solution, Gran said, would be "Mercury Burst" equipment, the signal of which could not be intercepted.

Asked who would operate and maintain the equipment, Gran said this would be no problem, as some Mujahideen are now using captured Soviet equipment with great success. Operators could be easily trained, he added.

The communications situation in Peshawar is difficult but not hopeless.

The best way to transmit news items out of Peshawar is via commercial (PTT) telex. According to Arbab Muhammad Safdar, PTT general manager in Peshawar, there are at present 70 telex connections in the city.

Safdar said an additional 120 lines had been approved for 1985 but so far he had not received any equipment and did not know when it would become available. Frankly, after my talk with him I see virtually no chance for new installations within the next year.

There is a telex available at the Inter-Continental Hotel. It is now being used by correspondents and an additional telex facility is available at the public PTT office.

John Dixon (USIS Peshawar) is checking to determine if other telex facilities can be used.

Telephone connections to points outside Pakistan are extremely difficult to establish. I tried for nearly a week to call the United States without success.

New telephones also are extremely difficult to obtain for lack of lines.

The only satellite up/down link at present is located in Karachi. Poor quality telephone (microwave) service from Peshawar would make regular video or still photograph transmissions highly unreliable.

Unless the Pakistani PTT embarks upon a crash modernization program, I see practically no chance of improving communications out of Peshawar. I mentioned this to Additional Secretary Najmuddin A. Shaikh, Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Shaikh maintained that communications would be no problem. It is possible that the ministry has extra lines for telex which could be made available. This does not change my assessment regarding video and still photo transmissions, however.

Contacts With Officials in Pakistan:

During my visit to Islamabad, I met with U.S. Embassy and Pakistani officials to discuss the project.

Part II

Recommendations:

Assisting Foreign Correspondents

The GOP is opposed to establishment of a formal Media Center for assisting foreign correspondents.

I suggest, therefore, that assistance be continued on an informal basis as is now being handled by USIS Peshawar. If availability of funds permit it, an officer should be assigned to exclusively handle this task. The present American Center Director John Dixon is doing the assistance job extremely well but he has other duties and is seriously over-worked, although he probably would not admit that. At least, someone should be assigned to understudy Dixon since he apparently is determined to leave Peshawar in a year.

In view of the ambiguous GOP attitude toward foreign correspondents venturing into Afghanistan, furnishing of guides and interpreters must remain with the Mujahideen parties. Besides, I seriously doubt that Mujahideen parties and the field commanders would accept and trust "outside" guides and interpreters.

An additional service to foreign newsmen in Peshawar would be to hold the weekly Kabul briefings there as well.

As far as the briefings are concerned, I recommend that these be presented with enthusiasm rather than in a bland fashion. A briefing officer reading his material in a manner which appears that he is uninterested or bored will transmit this feeling to his audience.

I also agree with Aftab of Associated Press (page 3) that it would give briefings a distinct boost if a Kabul officer were made available from time to time (even if it is only cosmetic since he probably will not be able to answer questions).

Video presentations of Kabul scenes such as rocket explosions at night (use of infrared film would be most dramatic) can add flavor to briefings.

Communications for filing stories appears adequate for foreign correspondents. However, additional telex facilities would always be welcome and application should be made now for an installation at the American Center.

Afghan News Operations (Printed Media):

I recommend that at least one experienced Western editor be assigned to the Afghan Information and Documentation Center (Akhbar) and one to the Afghan Information Center (Majrooh).

These editors would advise the two principals on news coverage, edit copy and maintain liason between the two bureaus. The latter is necessary because Akhbar and Majrooh are related but had a falling out and I see virtually no chance of them cooperating directly.

The two centers would continue to collect information as they do now -- from the parties, through travelers and with Akhbar periodically traveling inside Afghanistan.

The Akhbar operation should be strengthened with six additional reporters (he now has four in Peshawar and one in Quetta), one more for Peshawar and the other five to be used along the border. The salaries would average between 1000 Rs and 2000 Rs a month.

Majrooh would concentrate on analytical stories and Afghan situationers, as well as contribute spot news and act as briefer for foreign correspondents.

I do not believe Majrooh needs additional personnel.

Both centers need office equipment such as two or three manual typewriters each, and a copier which can be shared.

There is also a need for transport such as jeeps and/or motorcycles but this should be evaluated once the advisers are in place.

The editors should collaborate in writing a daily news summary of perhaps an average of 500 words, more of course when warranted by events.

The success of this operation will ride on the quality of the summary, its writing and organization. It must be a high-class product.

Occasionally the editors would transmit a particularly interesting feature story or situationer. The news summaries would be sent to all foreign news media based in Islamabad and to selected news agencies and newspapers around the world.

Communications will be a major expense. For this reason, I recommend that telex transmissions be handled through London, which has the cheapest rates. This would be accomplished by sending one summary to British Telcoms, or to one of numerous private telex agencies for automatic relay.

To illustrate the costliness of communications, a 500-word summary sent daily to 20 points around the world could cost up to \$130,000 a year.

The director of communications for Associated Press has been asked to study the communications cost aspects of this project. It may be that AP or Reuters can assume the transmission task in the least expensive way.

Another possibility would be to work through Kompas New Features, an agency established by the Aga Khan exclusively to handle news items from and of interest to the Third World. This agency is based in Luxembourg. My efforts to contact its General Manager, Claude Hippeau, have been unsuccessful.

The monthly bulletins now being produced by Akhbar and Majrooh would continue since these do provide some revenue.

However, the foreign editors must restructure the format of the bulletins and edit their contents to produce high-quality products.

All material would be written in English. There is no need for other languages such as French or Arabic. All the important news agencies and newspapers can handle English.

I believe using the Akhbar and Majrooh organizations, strengthened as I have outlined, is the least expensive way to accomplish the task of improving Afghan news handling for the written press.

An alternative would be to establish a separate facility which could be named "Afghan Media Assistance Bureau" or something similar.

The Media Assistance Bureau would be housed away from the Akhbar and Majrooh organizations. Again, it would be staffed by two foreign editors, whose job would be to produce and transmit news gathered by Akhbar and Majrooh.

At the same time, it would also serve as the training center for Mujahideen reporters. Of course, one or two professional foreign journalists would need to be added to the staff as instructors.

Such a bureau might also be acceptable to the GOP should it object to the Akhbar/Majrooh recommendation.

If the alternative is chosen, the Akhbar and Majrooh groups still need to be given funds for hiring additional reporters and for purchasing office equipment and transport.

Also, the foreign editors would need to liaise with Akhbar and Majrooh and serve as their advisers.

As far as Agence Afghan Press is concerned, I recommend against direct collaboration with this agency. However, there is no reason why the foreign editors could not also act as advisers to AAP since in time this may help to improve AAP's accuracy.

AAP might also be useful as a source for still photographs and television film. I will deal with this in another section of this report.

Also, I feel it would be politic to grant AAP a small annual stipend of perhaps \$5,000.

Still Photography:

It is essential that a concerted effort be made to produce quality still photographs of combat activities, as well as of other significant events, such as atrocities.

Photographs accompanying news stories would immediately enhance credibility of Afghan war information.

I will deal with the training of photographers later in this report.

Photographers generally should be equipped with easy-to-handle cameras such as the Nikon F 35 or Minoltas and should generally use black and white film. The more capable Mujahideen should be given more sophisticated equipment with long lenses, and they could use both black and white and color film, the latter for photographs suitable for magazines and distribution to special agencies such as Gamma and Black Star.

The ideal deployment of photographers would be in teams with reporters -- one reporter and one photographer. The photographer would shoot the action about which his teammate reports, thus establishing solid credibility.

Mujahideen also would accompany and shoot for foreign correspondents covering units in Afghanistan.

The photographers would be under the supervision of the foreign editors working with the Akhbar/Majrooh centers or the Media Assistance Bureau, where darkroom facilities must be established. The editors would also concern themselves with the purchase and issuance of film, other needed equipment and repair chores.

Photographs should be offered for sale to the major news agencies represented in Islamabad. The cost of black and white prints should be between \$50 and \$100. If exclusivity is desired by any agency or newspaper, a higher price should be negotiated.

Availability of photographs should also be messaged to recipients of the news summaries. Photographs can be requested for transmission via long distance telephone in which case the requesting party would initiate the call and pay transmission expenses.

There would be a transmission facility in Islamabad (telephone lines from Peshawar are unreliable), which will use two transmitters, one being a spare in case of breakdowns. These transmitters would be portable and can be purchased from Associated Press, which is producing the best machine on the market. The AP transmitter is designed to handle black and white and color and costs \$6,500.

Color photos would be offered to the special photo agencies which would pay their usual rates.

Color slides should be prepared for sale to photo agencies, and a photo package for weekly mailing to selected newspapers and agencies would enhance coverage.

There also is a need for graphics -- maps, etc. -- to illustrate stories and give newspaper readers a better picture of the Afghan war situation.

Television Coverage:

Television coverage of the Afghan war has been sporadic, chiefly because of difficult access to the combat areas and the extraordinary expense involved.

The major networks from time to time send in staff crews but never too far into the countryside.

The situation would be different if the risk would at least assure dramatic footage, such as produced in Lebanon, where according to an NBC producer the network has spent up to \$5,000,000 a week.

Networks will occasionally hire free-lance cameramen, but these, too, are expensive, at \$1,000 a day plus expenses.

Thus, the bulk of television coverage comes from free-lancers who offer their film to networks on speculation. The most active television free-lancers are French and British. There also is a very active American (Kurt Lohbeck) and a German (Dittmar Hack). Names of all free-lance TV people contacted will be included in an appendix. All can be contacted for future cooperation in this project.

Numerous attempts have been made to improve TV coverage but these have been inconsistent, hit-and-miss efforts.

At one point, the independent British TV film agency VISNEWS provided some 10 cameras to Mujahideen but virtually no training other than how to operate the equipment. As a result, the output was bad, the project fizzled out, and the cameras have disappeared.

AAP has two 16mm cameras and one home video camera. These have been used by Mujahideen and by an AAP staffer assigned to Hizb-e-Islami (Hekmatyar). I have seen some tapes. The results were marginal but showed that with training and proper equipment as well as backup, there could be dramatic improvement.

I recommend, therefore, that an Afghan Television Service Center be established in Peshawar by an experienced free-lance cameraman.

This free-lancer would also handle training. I will deal with this separately in this report.

The choice of equipment should be left to the TV expert running the center, but emphasis must be placed on simplicity, durability and cost. An ideal camera might be the new Sony 8 AF Auto Focus costing in the neighborhood of \$1,500.

He would also need the proper editing equipment.

Editing must be handled in Peshawar. No network will go to the trouble of handling two-hours of raw footage. Instead, the raw footage would be edited in Peshawar into one to four-minute segments. These segments would be properly captioned.

Longer features could also be provided on request and provisions would be made to produce archival footage.

Transmission of the finished product (one or two tapes) would be via air pouch or courier to Karachi, and from there by air to London.

All major networks as well as national and private TV companies from most major countries are represented in London. It is also the headquarters of VISNEWS, which has contracts with many Third World television entities.

The Peshawar TV center would have a part-time collaborator in London to produce copies and to notify potential users of what material is available.

TV footage should be sold at the going rates. In the case of major networks and agencies this should be \$1,000 per minute or more, perhaps, if exclusivity is desired.

I must rule out, at least for the beginning, transmission of footage via satellite from Pakistan, because of high costs.

It may be possible, however, to negotiate with a TV company, such as the Italian state-owned RIA, to have Afghan Television Service Center material placed on its satellite channel for pickup by others.

The television segment of this project may well be the most costly. I would be hard pressed to produce an exact cost figure but I would estimate it would be somewhere between \$150,000 and \$200,000 for the first year if expenses are closely controlled.

This project is the most complicated. I would guess that it would take at least six months before one can see measurable results.

The success of the television venture will depend on the professionalism of the person running it whether enough Mujahideen can be trained to warrant the expense.

I believe that the key to eventual success, and I can not stress this enough, is cost consciousness and patience.

I must repeat again, the television project is costly and complicated and it may well happen that after a year it must be reduced to be simply a support operation for free-lance cameramen.

Training of Mujahideen:

For the Printed Media

There are no trained Afghan journalists in Pakistan -- at least I am not aware of any.

That means that training would have to begin at the most elementary level. It would be foolish to expect to turn out editors. Furthermore, supply of English-speaking Mujahideen is extremely meager which means that the instructor must work through an interpreter.

Thus, the best one can hope for is to turn out a number of reporters to provide basic information -- what, where, when, how (let's forget the why) -- for the stories to be written by the foreign editors.

The basic instructions should be based on a typical police-type observation course, modified to include identification of military vehicles, aircraft and weapons recognition and military terminology.

The ideal instructor would be a professional journalist who has had military service or experience as a war correspondent. If such is not available, a retired military man should join the effort. At the very least, the instructor should be supplied proper visual aids through Department of Defense sources.

Training should be conducted in Peshawar and if at all possible by the foreign editors to keep down expenses and provide on-the-job experience.

Students must be requested from the Mujahideen parties. Officials from Hizb-e-Islami group, Jamiat, Harakat and Mahaz said they would have men available.

Although party officials have told me that they would have "many" men available, I have been warned that promises of any kind should be viewed with skepticism.

Classes should be conducted on the premises of either Akhbar or Majrooh or, if it is decided to establish a Media Assistance Bureau, at that group's facility.

I am against a separate training facility as a financial drain.

Still Photographers'

I propose that still photographers be trained on location with reporters.

A professional news photographer should be provided to teach a basic course. This instructor would also take charge of equipment and supplies purchases.

I believe that after the initial introduction to photography, including care and maintenance of equipment, as much time as possible be spent on field trips -- learning by doing -- and appropriate critiques.

The goal must be to train a number of photographers from the various Mujahideen groups for assignment with a reporter to form a news photo combat reporting team.

In addition to training photographers, the instructor must also seek one or two men and train them in laboratory work.

I believe that for our purposes two weeks of photography training will be sufficient. But it would be left to the instructor to make a definite determination.

Television Cameramen

The person selected to run the Television Service must also be in charge of training Mujahideen cameramen. This should be done even before he sets up the service center. Final determination must be left up to the television expert.

There are apparently one or two Mujahideen being trained in video camera work in the West but I was unable to pin down details. The service center operator should endeavor to locate them since they could well become the back-bone of his operation and eventually take over running the center.

The length of training must be left to the expert. I would imagine that he will have a mix of students, slow and fast learners.

As with still photographers, the emphasis must again be on learning by doing, i.e. field trips. The cameramen must be trained in elementary maintenance of equipment.

The students must be made to feel that they are an integral part of the Television Service Center.

It is essential that trainees be given the same courses in military matters as are to be provided print media reporters.

Following their training, the cameramen would return to their respective units.

Remuneration of Reporters, Photographers, and Cameramen:

Personnel working directly for any of the centers should be paid adequate wages. Majrooh mentioned a sum of between 1000 Rs and 2000 Rs a month. Akhbar and Majrooh would handle payments for their staff.

Payment of men belonging to Mujahideen groups may be a problem. I would suggest some sort of payment be made but only in consultation with party officials or commanders. Perhaps it would be best to seek the guidance of Akhbar and Majrooh, who will better understand the sensitivities of their own people.

Part III

Afghan Publicity Groups in Western Europe:

Besides Agence Afghan Press (London), I also interviewed the principals of two groups in Paris:

a. Hodayun Majrooh (nephew of Prof. Majrooh). He said he handled Afghan publicity affairs for several years and claims to have had financial support from French, German, and Belgian sources he did not identify. He has in the past sent TV cameras to Jamiat, he said, but I could not confirm this in Peshawar. I had the impression that his efforts have declined to virtually zero. Hodayun Majrooh said Patrice Franceschi, a French free-lance journalist and adventurer, is now planning to establish the Information Agency on Afghanistan. He said they believe they can do the job of news and video tape gathering for F 1,300,000 a year but have no financing as yet.

b. Hodayun Tandar, an impressive, well-educated young man who has been operating an Afghan information center in Paris for several years. He also publishes a periodical, Afghan Images. He has a sophisticated grasp of the news problems and has written a proposal for the establishment of an agency to be called Afghan Image Agency. It is well done. He estimated a budget of P 4,000,000 a year. There are two problems with this: 1. It is entirely a Jamiat operation. 2. The overhead appears astronomical.

Recommendation:

I recommend that neither group be included in the USG Afghan Media Center Project. In the case of Hodayun Majrooh, there is not sufficient substance to warrant financial support. As for Tandar, his project is too expensive and, more importantly, only represents the Jamiat, and this would definitely cause problems not only among the parties but also with the GOP.

John O. Koehler
October 6, 1985

Appendix
Persons Interviewed in Connection
with the
Afghan Media Center Project

New York

Jere Van Dyk, Friends of Afghanistan, Tel. 838-9722
Rosanne Klass, Freedom House, Tel. 730-7744 or 873-3838
Richard Atkins, Communications Director, The Associated Press
John Mulroy, International Communications Exec., The Associated Press

Paris

Homayun Majrooh, Information Agency on Afghanistan, Tel. 326-9752
Homayun Tandar, Afghan Images, Tel. 233-7048
Laurence Laumonier, MD, Intl. Med. Aid Society, Tel. 587-0298
Christopher de Pontfilly, independent TV producer and cameraman, Tel 285-1333
Michael Berry, Permanent Observer for Afghanistan, Intl. Federation on Human Rights.
Michael Goldsmith, Roving correspondent, The Associated Press.

Islamabad

Don Larrimore, Voice of America
Aaron Einfrank, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty
Tom Heneghan, Reuters
Elisabeth Auvillain, Radio France Internationale
Alex Brodie, British Broadcasting Co.
Tonny Rosiny, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung
Hanne Rossiny, Nordpress (West German feature agency)
Dimitri Kochko, Agence France Press
Mohammad Aftab
Noor Husain, Institute of Strategic Studies
Kamal Hyder, NBC and VISNEWS stringer
Mukhtar Hassan, Agence Afghan Press
Subahuddin Kushkaki, Cultural Council of the Afghan Resistance

Peshawar

Prof. S.B. Majrooh, Afghan Information Center
Fazle Akhbar, Afghan Information and Documentation Center
Mohammad Gailani, son of Per Syed Gailani, leader of Mahaz-e-Milli Islami
Prof. Rasul Amin, director, Writers Union of Free Afghanistan
Judge Mohammad Zalmay, president, Nat. Committee for Human Rights in Afghanistan
Olivier and Chantal Roy, Institute of Oriental Studies, Paris
Lawrence Walsh, free-lance writer under contract to Viking-Penguin Press
Edward Gorman, British free-lance TV cameraman
Pierre Issot Sargent, French free-lance TV cameraman
Laurnece Bohl, French free-lance TV cameraman

Naim Khan, Afghan Refugee Commissionerate

Eng. Ishaq, political committee of Jamiat-e-Islami

Qaribur Rahman Saeed, director general of press and information, Hizb-e-Islami (Hekmatyar)

Eng. Karim, political committee, Harakat-e-Inqilabe-e-Islami

Arbab Mohammad Safdar, general manager, Northern Region, Pakistan PTT

Mukhtar Hassan, Agence Afghan Press

John Crawford, adventurer and self-described contributor to Soldier of Fortune Magazine (Denver, Colo.)

Christopher Ratscliffe, London Observer

Abdul Qadir Arsala, commander in Hizb-e-Islami (Khalis)

Michael Tonneau, Director, Medical Aid For Afghans

Shah Rukh Gran, vice commander, Mahaz-e-Milli Islami

Theodor Mataxis, Brig. Gen.(ret.), Committee for a Free Afghanistan (U.S.)

Kamaluddin Koochy, interpreter and cameraman for Mahaz-e-Milli Islami

Philippe Flandrin, editor-in-chief, Black Star Photo Agency, Paris

Azim Afridi, regional director, Pakistan Press and Information Department

Henry Champ, NBC staff correspondent, London

Michael Mosher, Producer, NBC London

Brian Calvert, NBC cameraman, London

Peter Sansom, NBC soundman, London

Kabul Commander Niazzudin, Harakat

Lord Robert Crantson, Free Afghan Support Committee, London

Alistaire Crook, British Embassy

Frankfurt

Dittmar Hack, free-lance TV cameraman and producer, Tel. Munich 812-7665

London

Peter Champ, NBC

Michael Mosher, NBC

Horst Faass, Associated Press photo editor for Europe

Sayed Mohammad Tanzeem Wasti, director, Agence Afghan Press

Romy Fullerton, Free Afghanistan Support Committee

Peter Jouvenal, free-lance TV cameraman

David Mason, diplomatic correspondent, The Associated Press